



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT Division of Safety, Security, and Aviation	Watercraft Safety	DATE October 8, 2002

EXPLANATION OF MATERIAL TRANSMITTED:

This chapter outlines responsibilities for implementing the Department of the Interior mandated watercraft safety program and establishes minimum requirements for the safe operation of watercraft.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR

FILING INSTRUCTIONS:

Remove:

None

Insert:

242 FW 1, 10/08/02, FWM 408 (5 pages)
Exhibit 1, 242 FW 1, 10/08/02, FWM 408 (2 pages)

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1.1 What is the purpose of this chapter? This chapter outlines responsibilities for implementing the Department of the Interior (Department) mandated watercraft safety program and establishes minimum requirements for the safe operation of watercraft.

1.2 To whom does this chapter apply? This chapter applies to Service employees, volunteers, and others conducting official duties on watercraft.

1.3 What is the Service policy regarding operation of watercraft? We will operate all watercraft in a safe and prudent manner in accordance with local and State laws, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) regulations, Departmental regulations, and this chapter.

1.4 What are the authorities for the watercraft safety program?

A. Public Law 91-596, Sec 19, Federal Agency Safety Programs and Responsibilities.

B. Executive Order 12196, Occupational Safety and Health Programs for Federal Employees.

C. 29 CFR 1960, Basic Program Elements for Federal Employee Occupational Safety and Health Programs and Related Matters.

D. 485 DM 22, Watercraft Safety.

1.5 What definitions are useful in understanding the requirements of this chapter?

A. Anti-Exposure Gear. USCG-approved anti-exposure coverall/worksuit, USCG-approved float coat/jacket, or combination of a USCG-approved float coat/jacket and flotation bib or comparable gear such as a USCG-approved float jacket and neoprene waders.

B. Crew. Personnel other than the operator who are essential to the operation of the watercraft.

C. Immersion Suit. A one-piece USCG-approved Type V personal flotation device of neoprene construction that is generally stowed on board, is donned in the event of an emergency, and provides greater hypothermia protection than anti-exposure gear.

D. Kill Switch. A device designed to shut off an engine if the operator, who is attached to the switch via a lanyard, is thrown away from the controls.

E. Motorboat. Any watercraft 65 feet or less in length with a motor that does not require a USCG license or certification to operate.

F. Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC). The 24-hour training course that those who operate Service or Department motorboats must successfully complete.

G. Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC). The 36-hour training course that individuals who teach the MOCC must successfully complete.

H. Operator. The individual in physical control of the watercraft.

I. Personal Flotation Device (PFD). A Department - and USCG-approved device designed to keep the user afloat in the event of accidental immersion. See Exhibit 1 for illustrations of the types of USCG-approved PFDs. The Department requires that each Type I, III, or V PFD be international orange in color and have retroreflective tape (485 DM 22).

J. Watercraft. Boats and ships collectively; propelled by hand, wind, or machinery (i.e., airboats, sailboats, inflatable rafts, and all other vessels). Seaplanes are not considered watercraft under this chapter.

1.6 Who is responsible for the watercraft safety program?

A. Director will:

(1) Ensure sufficient support and resources to effectively implement watercraft safety program requirements.

(2) Appoint the Service Watercraft Safety Coordinator.

B. Assistant Director - Business Management and Operations will:

(1) Nominate the Service Watercraft Safety Coordinator to the Director, with assistance from the Chief, Division of Safety, Security, and Aviation.

(2) Provide sufficient support and resources to the Chief, Division of Safety, Security, and Aviation to ensure that responsibilities identified in paragraph 1.6C can be effectively accomplished.

C. Chief, Division of Safety, Security, and Aviation will:

(1) Facilitate, administer, and support the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group.

(2) In conjunction with the Service Watercraft Working Group, update and revise Service policy for watercraft safety.

(3) Work closely with the Service Watercraft Coordinator to ensure the Service actively participates on the Departmental Watercraft Safety Working Group.

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(4) Convey pertinent Service watercraft safety issues to the Departmental Safety Council.

D. Regional Directors will:

(1) Ensure that sufficient support and resources are provided to effectively implement watercraft safety program requirements.

(2) Appoint a qualified Regional watercraft safety coordinator.

E. Service Watercraft Safety Coordinator will:

(1) Serve as the watercraft safety program point of contact with other Bureaus and the Department.

(2) Serve as the Service representative on the Departmental Watercraft Safety Working Group.

(3) Serve as the chairperson of the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group.

(4) Successfully complete MOCC and MOICC training. If not taken previous to appointment, the Service Watercraft Safety Coordinator must complete the MOCC and MOICC within 1 year of appointment, and have a minimum of 5 years of boating experience.

F. The Service Watercraft Safety Working Group will:

(1) Assess training needs and discuss standardized approaches and best business practices for conducting the Motorboat Operator Certification Course (MOCC), MOCC refresher training, Motorboat Operator Instructor Certification Course (MOICC), and any additional specialized training modules.

(2) Ensure watercraft safety training meets the operational needs of the Service workforce.

(3) Evaluate the adequacy of the requirements in this chapter and propose policy and procedural additions or changes, as appropriate.

G. Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinators will:

(1) Coordinate Regional compliance with policies and procedures governing the operation, maintenance, and safety of watercraft.

(2) Actively participate on the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group.

(3) Successfully complete MOCC and MOICC training. If not taken previous to appointment, Regional Watercraft Coordinators must complete the MOCC and MOICC within 1 year of appointment, and have a minimum of 5 years of boating experience.

(4) Coordinate and oversee the Regional MOCC program, to include approving all Service MOCCs taught in the Region and their lead instructors.

H. Regional Safety Managers will:

(1) Review requests for 1-year exemptions to the PFD color and reflective tape requirements (paragraph 1.8A(1)).

(2) Review requests for 1-year authorizations of auto-inflating PFD use as outlined in paragraph 1.8A(2).

I. Project Leaders and Supervisors will:

(1) Establish protocols to ensure that watercraft operations are conducted in a safe manner and in compliance with established Departmental and Service policies and procedures.

(2) Establish protocols to ensure that watercraft and equipment are maintained in compliance with existing policies and procedures, such as the Service's Maintenance Management System (372 FW 1 and 2).

(3) Ensure that all employees, volunteers, and others who operate and work in watercraft are trained in watercraft operations appropriate to the:

(a) Type and size of watercraft used.

(b) Geographic, climatic, and physical nature of the operations.

(c) Operational task being performed.

(4) Provide the safety and survival equipment identified as needed by the watercraft operator.

J. The Watercraft Operator will:

(1) Complete the MOCC and maintain certification.

(2) Be responsible for the safety of personnel on board regardless of position and grade, and operate the watercraft in compliance with existing policies, guidelines, and training.

(3) Determine what safety and survival equipment is needed and ensure that the required safety equipment is on board and maintained in good serviceable condition.

(4) Show the crew and passengers where emergency equipment is located and provide any other information that would be essential in event of an emergency.

(5) Provide written or verbal notification to a responsible individual outlining pertinent details (e.g., when departing and returning, etc.) of the trip. Deviations to this requirement may be necessary for certain operations (see paragraph 1.11).

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(6) Use a kill switch when required (paragraph 1.9).

K. Other Personnel on board any watercraft will:

(1) Obey lawful orders of the watercraft operator.

(2) Adhere to all safety regulations.

(3) At all times conduct themselves in a reasonable and prudent manner.

1.7 What are the training requirements for watercraft operators?

A. MOCC. Operators of Service motorboats must, at a minimum, successfully complete the Department of the Interior MOCC or an approved substitute course. Prior to taking the MOCC, employees may practice motorboat operation under the supervision of an MOCC-trained operator on board the watercraft. Motorboat operation by employees who have not taken the MOCC will only be used to gain experience prior to completing the MOCC. Contact the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator to register for the MOCC or to request approval for a substitution. 485 DM 22 contains additional information on the MOCC course content.

B. MOCC Refresher Training. Refresher training is required every 5 years and consists of an educational classroom module and a practical proficiency module.

(1) The educational classroom module can be completed by one of the following methods:

(a) Taking the computer Internet course provided by the [National Conservation Training Center](#). A score of 70 percent or more is required to pass.

(b) Retaking and passing the MOCC.

(c) Successfully completing the MOICC.

(2) The practical proficiency module can be completed using one of the following methods:

(a) Hands-on demonstration of boating exercises in the presence of a certified instructor. This method should be selected if the employee operates motorboats occasionally as a normal part of his/her duties.

(b) Significant proven and safe operation of motorboats since completing the initial or previous refresher MOCC. This method may be selected if the individual operates motorboats regularly as a routine part of his/her job.

(c) Retaking the MOCC. This should be selected if the individual has not operated motorboats on a regular basis as a normal part of his/her job and needs to remain certified.

(d) Successful completion of the MOICC.

C. MOICC. Individuals who have successfully completed the MOICC will instruct MOCC courses. 485 DM 22 contains additional information on the MOICC course content.

D. Additional Training. Project leaders and supervisors will ensure that watercraft operators have received adequate training to safely operate their watercraft within the water and environmental conditions they are assigned. Successful completion of the MOCC does not imply that the employee is competent to operate a motorboat in all conditions that may be encountered. Training courses in specialized subjects such as Airboat Operations, Moving Water Operations, and Open Water Operations are available. It is the responsibility of the project leader or supervisor to ensure that all operators have the skills needed for the conditions in which they are reasonably expected to operate. Lack of course availability does not alleviate the project leader or supervisor of the responsibility to ensure that the watercraft operator is properly trained. Contact the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator for further information.

E. Airboats.

(1) Airboat operators must complete the 8-hour Airboat module in addition to the MOCC and have 40 hours of documented driving time before qualifying to operate an airboat independently. Until October 1, 2004, a grace period is in effect that allows experienced airboat operators, who may be exempt from the documentation of the 40 hours of driving time requirement, sufficient time to complete their 8-hour airboat module training requirement. In order for experienced operators to be exempt from the documentation of the 40 hours of driving time requirement, they must:

(a) Demonstrate proficiency at operating airboats safely.

(b) Have no recorded airboat accidents.

(c) Possess a minimum of 40 hours of airboat driving time.

(2) Document the exemption on FWS Form 3-2236 (Airboat Operation Documentation Exemption Form). Both the employee and his/her project leader/supervisor must sign the form. Keep the form in the employee's personnel file at the station and mail a copy to the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator.

1.8 What safety and survival equipment are required for watercraft? Each watercraft will meet or exceed applicable USCG, Department, and Service design and equipment requirements and will be outfitted based upon expected conditions with other equipment necessary for safe operation. Maintain all USCG-required personal safety equipment pursuant to USCG regulations and comply with State and local laws and equipment requirements.

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A. Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs):

(1) PFDs must be on board and accessible for each occupant of all watercraft. Personnel will wear a Type I, III, or V PFD at all times while on board motorboats less than 26 feet in length, and when in open spaces (or when directed by the operator) while on motorboats 26 to 65 feet in length. Motorboats 16 feet or more in length will also be equipped with at least one throwable (Type IV) PFD. Personnel on board non-motorized watercraft will wear a PFD at all times. Exhibit 1 shows USCG-approved personal flotation devices. PFDs will be international orange in color and equipped with retroreflective tape in accordance with 485 DM 22. Deviations from this requirement may be permitted when there are special mission requirements, (i.e., special law enforcement operations), that cannot be otherwise satisfied. The project leader of the organizational unit conducting the operation must authorize deviations in writing, prior to conducting this activity. The written authorization will identify alternate safety measures to be taken, such as use of a visual display signal, whistle, strobe light, etc. Deviations will be authorized on a case-by-case basis except where they have the concurrence of the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator and the Regional Safety Manager. In those cases, the deviation may be authorized for a period not to exceed 1 year.

(2) Auto-Inflating PFDs are only authorized for use in special circumstances, where the use of a conventional PFD can be shown to increase the health and safety risks to the employee when compared to the auto-inflating PFD. Request special authorization for auto-inflating PFD use on a case-by-case basis from the Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator. These special authorizations can be approved for a period not to exceed 1 year, with the concurrence of the Regional Safety Manager. The Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator will review each request for authorization with the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group.

(3) Any request for the authorization of auto-inflating PFD use must be accompanied with a detailed plan for additional training and set out a maintenance program that the employee will be required to comply with. Maintenance will be performed in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. At a minimum, the employee must inspect the auto-inflating PFD after each immersion or every 6 months, if not immersed during that time frame. Also every 6 months, the employee will inspect the bladder, arming device, carbon dioxide canister, and seal. The training provided will be specific to the type and model auto-inflating PFD to be used and must include in-water testing by the employee. The training will also cover maintenance and inspection requirements as well as repacking procedures.

B. Fire Protection Equipment. At a minimum, one USCG-approved fire extinguisher must be on all motorized watercraft.

C. Anti-Exposure Gear. Required when air temperature and water temperature combined fall below 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

D. Immersion Suits.

(1) Required for all occupants when working in areas subject to cold, harsh, ocean, or ocean-like conditions. When immersion suits are required, each occupant of the watercraft must be assigned the suit they are to use in case of emergency, shown how to use it, and given the opportunity to practice using it.

(2) Inspect immersion suits after every use, and at least every 6 months if not used. Maintain them as recommended by the manufacturer. Immersion suits authorized for use by Service personnel will be of neoprene construction and capable of being donned by personnel who are fully clothed, including footgear. If equipped with a liner, the liner must be incapable of becoming detached from the outer suit or causing the victim to become entangled while donning. Gloves or mittens will be an integral component of the suit.

(3) New designs in immersion suits that do not meet the standards set forth in paragraph 1.8D(2) above may be authorized for use by the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group. Individuals who wish to have the Working Group consider an immersion suit for authorization, should submit a request to their Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator for presentation to the Service Watercraft Safety Working Group.

E. Communications Equipment. Communications Equipment (e.g., marine radio, cell phone, Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB), Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELTs), etc.) capable of requesting emergency assistance and maintaining radio schedules will be provided to operators of all watercraft, except in those instances where the operator has determined that the equipment is not necessary due to the nonhazardous nature of the operating environment. As with all safety and survival equipment identified in paragraph 1.8, it is the project leader's/supervisor's responsibility to provide what the operator identifies as needed (paragraph 1.6I(4) and 1.6J(3)).

F. Navigation Aids. Navigational Aids suitable to the mission must be on board the watercraft. The aids may include a compass, radar, GPS, depth finder, etc.

G. Auxiliary Power. Auxiliary Power (e.g., an extra outboard motor) is recommended for motorboats operated in areas where in the event of primary engine failure, assistance is not easily obtained. Auxiliary power is required for motorboats operated in areas where assistance is unavailable.

1.9 When is a kill switch required to be used? Operators of motorboats must use kill switches at all times while operating motorboats 26 feet or less in length except in those rare instances when it increases the risk to personnel; for example, when operating upstream from a significant hazard,

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operating in extremely rough water, while effecting a rescue, or performing nonhazardous work tasks within the boat. This does not apply to small auxiliary engines used on boats for emergency propulsion in case of main engine failure. Motorboats larger than 26 feet will also have kill switches installed and used when either the motorboat operator, project leader/supervisor, or Regional Watercraft Safety Coordinator determines that the need for a kill switch exists. The need for the kill switch is based upon the possibility of the operator being knocked from the controls or being thrown overboard. The type of boat, the condition the boat is operated in, and the tasks that are performed, all must be considered in making this determination. Airboats are exempted from the kill switch requirement. NOTE: When operating tiller driven outboard powered motorboats, the kill switch will be attached to the operator whenever the engine has been shifted to forward or reverse.

1.10 What are the minimum maintenance documentation requirements? Maintain watercraft in good serviceable condition as required by the manufacturer and pursuant to this chapter. FWS Form 3-2226 is a preventative Maintenance Checklist. It is the responsibility of the project leader to see that all watercraft are maintained as needed. It is the responsibility of the watercraft operator to inspect the vessel for seaworthiness and proper equipment prior to taking the vessel out. A maintenance log is required for each watercraft and motor. The logs must contain the results of inspections, maintenance performed, fueling operations, trip information, total hours, and trailer maintenance information. For motorboats, maintenance logs will be kept on board when space allows.

1.11 What are the requirements for a float plan? Prior to using a watercraft, the operator must provide verbal or written notification to a reliable contact with the following minimum information: what watercraft is being used, who is on board, point of departure, point of destination, estimated time of departure, estimated time of return, purpose of the trip, and any vehicles used. Deviation from these requirements is permitted if special mission situations prevent the conveyance of this information. FWS Form 3-2227 (Float Plan) may be used for this purpose.

1.12 What are the requirements for surf landings? Surf landings under high surf conditions are dangerous and require special skills. Only experienced personnel may attempt these landings. A second vessel should be standing by to render assistance.

1.13 What are the requirements for accident reporting and investigations? Operators must report all Service accidents and near accidents to their project leader or supervisor. The project leader or supervisor is responsible for completing an accident report using the Department's [Safety Management Information System](#) (SMIS), regardless of whether or not injuries occurred or the cost of associated property damage.

A. Serious accidents (loss of life, or three or more people hospitalized, or Service property loss of \$250,000 or greater) will be investigated and reported in accordance with 485 DM 7. The investigation team or trained investigator appointed by the Assistant Director - Business Management and Operations will include at least one member of the Service Watercraft Safety Workgroup. This individual cannot be from the Region experiencing the accident.

B. The project leader/supervisor will complete Boating Accident Report, (USCG Form 3865), whenever an accident occurs in U.S. or territorial waters involving a Service vessel (including vessels under contract and vessels permitted to operate on Departmental waters) that results in an excess of \$2,000 in property damage, or an injury causing incapacitation in excess of 72 hours, or loss of life.